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# Amin will return to ravage Uganda, former aide says

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LONDON — The news from Uganda yesterday was of peace treaties, but "Major Bob" Astles was having none of it.

"Uganda is a disaster. There is anarchy, fighting and killing. ... Idi Amin will come back, you will see. He is a real danger — his troops are already in position there. He has reviewed them in the Sudan. They are the only ones still fighting. ..."

For a man who until only a week ago was in his seventh year in prison in Uganda, 62-year-old Bob Astles was surprisingly strong in voice, firm in handshake and still completely involved in the political life of what he calls "my country."

The world knew Bob Astles as the one white confidant and aide to Idi Amin — the "Butcher of Africa," the self-styled "Conqueror of the British Empire," buffoon and ruthless dictator who is alleged to have been responsible for the murders of at least 200,000 people in Uganda during his eight-year reign of terror.

Mr. Astles was therefore seen as a something of a Himmler or a Goebbels, or at least what the Mail on Sunday described as a "seedy, shifty-eyed clown" who had risen to become the "eminence blanche to one of the most preposterous mass-murderers of our time — Idi Amin."

But Mr. Astles is back in London now, homeless, stateless — and anxiously trying to clear his name. He insists he is innocent of all the allegations against him — including complicity in the murders of Uganda's Archbishop Luwom, four European journalists, a Kenyan businessman and British businessman Robert Scanlon.

Interviewed at the London flat of his new personal agent, John Marshall, Mr. Astles insisted that he was a stabilizing influence on Amin, and that he did it all not for personal power and riches but for the love of the "little Africans," the "village Ugandans who suffer so terribly."

He has much to tell, but he said he is saving the details for a book. This includes, he says, details about CIA and Mafia involvement in Amin's Uganda and much documentary evidence about himself and Amin that has never been published.

In his quest for credibility, and to win British government approval for extending his three-month visa — if

not for restoration of his British citizenship — he has already appeared on BBC breakfast-time television together with the son of a man he is supposed to have been involved in killing — Robert Scanlon. The son said he did not blame Mr. Astles.

The story that Mr. Astles wants the world to know is that he was as much in fear of his life from Amin as anyone else, that he was not an oppressor, but a survivor.

Born in Hampshire to a military family, Mr. Astles served with the British army in the Middle East during World War II, rising to the rank of sergeant major. He first went to Uganda in 1949 and returned there with the British colonial service in 1952. Ten years later, when Uganda became independent, he founded Uganda Aviation and then managed Uganda Television until 1971, when Amin seized power from Milton Obote.

He is married to a black Ugandan, a former cultural minister who still lives there, although his two children have left the country.

As an Obote supporter, Mr. Astles went to jail in 1971, but when the Englishman outwitted Amin in a nationally televised program designed to condemn him, the new dictator was amused. Amin released him and sent him back to his farm on the shores of Lake Victoria.

Four years later, Mr. Astles was asked to return to head Uganda Aviation, now the national airline. Over the next four years Mr. Astles served in various capacities with Amin — including head of the anti-

corruption squad — and was associated with the dreaded State Research Bureau, the worst of Amin's death squads.

Mr. Astles said he was in and out of favor with Amin, who he says was not mad or driven insane by syphilis but did have a drinking problem and did enjoy his power. Mr. Astles believes there were at least four attempts by Amin to kill him.

"I was becoming an embarrassment, because I was the one who was stopping his officers. They said, 'Bob spoils things for us.'"

Why, if Amin wanted him dead, did he stay with Amin? Why did he return from England to probable death or imprisonment? Why did he associate with a man responsible for so much death and brutality?

Basically, he answered that STAT was caught up in events.

"It was a war between him and I. He was going to win, in the end. I was going to survive as long as possible," he said. "When I escaped and went to England I knew I was a coward. By the time I got to England I was very depressed about running away."

He said it was Amin's "job" to try to kill him, that Amin wasn't as mad

as he was made out to be and that the killings were not genocide but tribal wars common to Africa.

He went back, he said, partly because his wife was still in Uganda under house arrest. It was, he said, a "cat and mouse game."

"Me, he has locked up. Me, he has tried to kill. I knew in the end I would not survive him. But somewhere along the line I am also the man who could say to him 'that [white] businessman is a crook, sir. Chuck him out.' I've done it. ..."

"What I have got is enough for him to have to answer. I want to be clear

about this. I have never seen Amin kill a man, but I cannot exonerate him on some of the issues. ... He may have killed over girlfriends, or over money."

Mr. Astles fled to Kenya when the Tanzanian army entered the country in 1979, but the Kenyans arrested him and sent him back. Charged with the murder of an African fisherman, he was acquitted but not released. The Ugandan government released him — as long as he left the country — four years later.

He admitted he is physically in London but emotionally and men-

tally still in Uganda. And last week he got a phone call from Amin himself.

From exile in Saudi Arabia, "Field Marshal" Amin sounded cool and rational, according to Mr. Astles. He even asked Mr. Astles to return to Uganda with him.

"He congratulated me for getting out. But he was trying to deflect me from what I am doing in this country. He wanted me to make out that all Ugandans love him. He is powerful and he does have loyal supporters."

"But I am [Milton] Obote's man, because he is a statesman who believes in democracy. I will not go back with Amin. I will not serve him ever again."

"I am going to devour him."